

Dear Chairman McCrory, Chairman Sanchez, Ranking Member Berthel, Ranking Member McCarty, Vice Chairs, and distinguished members of the committee,

My name is Sharon R. Baanante. I live in Norwalk and I am the Mom of a Norwalk Public Schools student. I sit on the Norwalk Public Library Board and Board of Trustees as well as the Norwalk Commission on the Status of Women.

I'm testifying in support of H.B. 5283 because all students should have access to the resources necessary to support their specific learning needs in order to thrive in the classroom and beyond. I live on a road where half of the houses are in Norwalk and the other half are in New Canaan. It saddens me to know that the kids in New Canaan, just a few houses down the road, have access to a much better public education than the children of Norwalk. Our zip codes should not define our children's access to an equitable public education.

According to the State Department of Education, Norwalk allocates \$19,770 per a student. In our neighboring towns of Wilton and Darien, the students are allocated \$22,000. Right off the bat, Norwalk kids are short changed. These allocations do not consider that 68% of Norwalk students are identified as high needs, compared to Wilton and Darien's 20%. To add to that, 74% of Norwalk children identify as BIPOC. We must take the racial and socio-economical variables into consideration in order to equitably fund the schools.

With covid disproportionately affecting the BIPOC community, we have seen firsthand the impact that it has had on the socio-economic status of Norwalk families and the mental health of our children. Norwalk Public Schools are doing more than their fair share of social services to keep our students and families afloat. To make matters worse, we are faced with the threat of the impending federal fiscal cliff due to the loss of ESSER funding. So, additional funding is needed to not only bridge this funding gap, but it is also critical to the long term educational outcomes of our Norwalk students.

In closing, I am grateful that this bill recognizes the need to create a more equitable Connecticut, both racially and socio-economically. I urge you to support it.

Thank you,

Sharon R. Baanante